

# HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSOURI, *Chicago, Illinois, September 20, 1881.*

Brigadier General R. C. Drum,  
Adjutant General United States Army,  
Washington, D. C.,

## GENERAL :

For the purpose of acquiring additional knowledge of the interesting country in and about the Big Horn Mountains, and the valleys of the Big Horn, Grey Bull and Stinking Water, and Clark's Fork, lying west of and between the Big Horn and the main chain of the Rocky Mountains, and thence crossing the main chain to the National Park, I started on July 27th, accompanied by General Delos B. Sacket, Inspector-General, U. S. A., Lieutenant-Colonels M. V. Sheridan and James F. Gregory, of my staff, General M. D. Hardin, retired, General William E. Strong, Mr. Samuel Johnson and Mr. E. N. Sheldon, of Chicago, and Dr. W. P. Wesselhoff and son, of Boston, and proceeded by the Union Pacific Railroad to Rock Creek Station, and from thence due north by land transportation to Fort Fetterman, distant eighty-five miles from Rock Creek Station. This journey from the railroad was made in one day. The country traveled over was, for the most part, uninteresting, except at a few points, until Fort Fetterman was reached, just before sundown, July 30th. Although the country was unsettled, large herds of cattle, for some distance from the railroad and about Fort Fetterman, indicated the presence of numerous cattle ranches.

Resting at Fetterman the night of July 30th, at an early hour next morning we started for Powder River, traveling in a general direction nearly northwest, crossing the south and north forks of the Belle Fourche, which river, with the south fork of the Cheyenne, almost encircles the Black Hills, reaching Powder River before sunset, July 31st, distant from Fetterman 90 miles.

The country traveled over was rolling, and to some extent sandy, with abundance of sage brush, sparsely watered, but, strange to say, was occupied by some of the largest herds of cattle in Wyoming, and the ranges were considered excellent. South of the line traveled this day, all the way down to the Union Pacific Railroad, large herds of cattle and comfortable cattle ranches are to be found.

Powder River Valley, where we rested for the night, is not prepossessing, especially about the crossing, but up and down the river, from this point, it offers to the cattle-man pastures of great value, and is occupied by thousands of cattle. We stopped near the post of old Fort Reno, abandoned long ago. All that is necessary in this valley for cultivation, with satisfactory results, is industry and irrigation, for which latter the river offers good inducements as there is sufficient water.

The next morning, August 1st, we made an early start, and almost from the moment we left the valley of the Powder River, traveling northwestward, we discovered an improvement in the soil and grasses. At about 12 m. we reached Fort McKinney, named after an officer killed in an engagement which Colonel Mackenzie had with the Northern Cheyennes, not very distant from this military post.

McKinney is truly, in location and surroundings, a beautiful post. It is on Clear Fork of Powder River, with good fine granite soil under foot. The quarters for officers and men are fairly comfortable, but wanting in repairs and other improvements in detail. Ditches conveying pure, clear water encircle the parade ground, in front of the quarters of the officers and men, and empty out into an extensive garden, on a lower plateau, just below and behind the post.

Early on the morning of August 2d, we resumed our march through the undulating country lying between the base of the Big Horn Mountains and Wolf Mountains—a much lower range farther to the north and east—reaching Tongue River, distant 55 miles, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

The country between Clear Fork, Fort McKinney, and Tongue River is excellent in soil, and, for natural nutritious grasses, the best I have ever seen, with the exception, perhaps, of the pastures of the higher ranges of the Big Horn Mountains and like ranges on the main chain of the Rocky Mountains, along Clark's Fork, where the grazing can only be for the summer months.

Between McKinney and Tongue River there are numerous streams, the valleys of which are being settled up by thrifty farmers, with extensive fields of wheat, oats and barley. The vegetable gardens were excellent, the varieties embracing most of those raised in eastern sections of our country. The fields of wheat, oats and barley were of better quality and greater in quantity, to the acre, than those seen on the east side of the Missouri.

The streams coming down from the Big Horn Mountains, and emptying into the Clear Fork of Powder River and Tongue River, are numerous, the grasses strong and nutritious—bunch grass preponderating. The same character of country continues on northward across the Little Horn and Greasy Grass Creeks, with even an improvement of the soil and a greater variety of grasses, all the way to the Big Horn River—distant about 75 miles.

At a distance of 15 or 20 miles north of Tongue River, in the direction of old Fort C. F. Smith, the eastern line of the reservation of the Crows is reached, and no settlement of this valuable country has been permitted. The Crows have never occupied it heretofore, and never could hold it until the Northern Cheyennes, Sioux and Arapahoes were driven out by the war of 1876. This country now forms part of the Crow reservation, which contains about *six and a quarter millions* of acres, and as the whole number of Crows does not exceed 3,500, this gives each man, woman and child in the tribe about 2,000 acres. The greater portion of it should be purchased from them by the Government, for what it is *worth to them*, and opened to settlement, and but a short time would elapse until it would be densely covered by thrifty farmers and by thousands and thousands of cattle.

In former times, the country between the Yellowstone Valley and the base of the Big Horn Mountains was the winter range of the great northern herd of buffalo. They are now being killed off and replaced by a better and more useful animal—the cattle of civilization.

That portion of this valuable country claimed, and acknowledged by the Government as belonging to the Crow Nation, never did belong to them by conquest or occupation, so far as is known. It was held by the Northern Cheyennes and their allies, the Sioux and Arapahoes, and occupied by these people for a long period. After the military, in 1876, drove out these tribes, who held it at least by right of conquest, and certainly by that of possession, the Crows came in to spread their blankets on their soil, as they said, and gather berries and roots for a month or two in the summer. It is too valuable to remain idle for such insignificant productions.

The country between the eastern base of the Big Horn Range and the Wolf and Rosebud Mountains, and down to the Yellowstone River, is from about 90 to 150 miles in width and 180 in length; if it had added to it that portion of the Crow reservation between the Little Big Horn and the Big Horn Rivers, it would have an encouraging future. The streams which run from the mountains into the Clear Fork, Tongue River and Little Horn are clear and rapid, and the valleys are broad. The soil is good, except in the broken bad lands down towards the Yellowstone, and is fully as susceptible of cultivation as other settled lands this side of the Missouri, and in my judgment will produce, independent of irrigation, after two or three plowings. The pasturage is the best, for the year round, of any section of the United States. There is no record of very bad winter snows, last winter being the worst ever known. There are no heavy or continuous rains in the late summer and fall, and the grass makes good, dry hay on the stalk, instead of falling to the ground and rotting, as is the case in the East and South. When I visited this country, less than four years ago, it was the land of the Indian and the buffalo; now it has numerous farms and cattle ranches, with cattle by the thousands, this side of the Little Horn.

At 6 A. M., August 4th, we moved from the banks of Tongue River and ascended the grassy, precipitous slope of the Big Horn Mountains, north of Tongue River, making a steep ascent to the first elevated ridge, which commanded a view to the north and eastward, well on to the valley of the Yellowstone River. We continued for the day gradually ascending, in a direction parallel with Tongue River, and passing through a succession of grassy parks encircled by pine timber, until we reached a point near the junction of the north and south forks, where we encamped. Next day we resumed our march, following up the north fork through beautiful natural parks, larger and more interesting than on the day previous; in fact, they were almost as complete in beauty as those cultivated by the hand and skill of man. Passing over the main divide, nearly 10,000 feet in altitude, we made camp in a beautiful resting place for the night. From this camp we could look over to the west and see an extensive country, in which runs the Wind River—with the Grey Bull and Stinking Water Rivers in the distance—and far beyond these rivers, and from whence they take their source, we could see the main line of the Rocky Mountains. There are few places, if any, where a grander or more interesting view can be had.

During our succeeding marches from this camp, we crossed innumerable streams of pure, cold water, most of them having their source in large flowing springs. Next day we continued our march towards old Fort C. F. Smith, and well along the summit of the mountains, through parks similar to those mentioned, tufted with a luxuriant growth of bunch and gama grasses. On the succeeding day, in the line of marching, we again came down the mountain on the edge of the Black Cañon, and from the overhanging bank we looked down to its parky meadow bottom, 2,900 feet below—a rare and interesting picture that it is hoped will be placed on canvas by the highest order of talent, at some future day.

On August 8th we reached the old abandoned military post of Fort C. F. Smith, and encamped on the banks of the Big Horn. Here we found the Big Horn too deep to ford, but the commanding officer at Fort Custer, forty miles below, had, in accordance with instructions sent him, a company of cavalry and two boats to ferry us across. The animals were driven into the stream and swam over.

On the morning of August 10th, at six, we resumed our march and crossed over a grassy country, making for Pryor's Gap. We encamped on Sage Creek.

Next day we resumed the march, encamping for the night on Pryor's Fork of the Yellowstone, a bold running stream filled with large trout, from which the command took several hundred, varying in size from 1½ to 2½ pounds. The valley of Pryor's River is broad, with fine alluvial soil. Just below on the river, distant four or five miles, was an encampment of seventy or eighty lodges of Crow Indians, the first of this tribe we had seen, except our guides, although, while in the Big Horn Mountains, we passed near by a large camp who were there for a short time gathering berries.

In the last two days we had crossed the Big Horn Valley, rather narrow at our line of march, but widening out further down towards the Yellowstone. From where we crossed this valley, to the Yellowstone, it is about seventy-five miles in length and from ten to fifteen miles broad. It has excellent soil and good grasses for grazing purposes. The country from this, over to Pryor's Fork, is higher, with several streams coming down from Pryor's Mountains, and is unequaled for grazing purposes, from the good grasses and from the freedom from snow in the winter. It is subjected in the winter to warm winds, called, out there, the "Chanook" winds, which cause the snow to melt and be absorbed rapidly.

On August 12th we resumed the march, passing Pryor's Gap, a low and easy passage-way, with a picturesque and abrupt mountain on either side. This gap had been the scene of a contest between the Crow Indians on one side, and the Northern Cheyennes and Sioux on the other, several years ago, in which, according to the testimony of our Crow guide, their side had been successful. Numerous piles of stones, conical in shape, some large and some small, marked the resting place of those killed in this engagement. Each of our guides deposited, according to the custom of their people, tobacco, pipes, coin, or some articles taken from their persons, as offerings to their companions whose bones rested under these heaps of stones.

We made a very long march this day, crossing Sage Creek and a level plain somewhat covered with sage brush, until we reached Bridger's road, and thence through a remarkably bad section of bad lands until we encamped on Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone for the night. Next day we resumed our march up Clark's Fork, skirted by bad lands on the left and a high, broken, grassy, rolling country across Clark's Fork on the right. Down Clark's Fork towards the Yellowstone, as far as we could see, the valley looked well, but on the line of our march up the stream, while the soil was good, irrigation will be necessary to get good results, in grasses or from cultivation. It resembles the soil of the Salt Lake Valley, before Mormon industry and irrigation had made it as it now is, so fertile and bountiful.

The direction we wished to take up Clark's Fork had to be abandoned, as it required us to cross the river many times, and the water was too high for fording. We therefore made a new trail by keeping on the west side of the river, occasionally being forced by bluff banks to pass out into the bad lands, to round a point. This river offers, from the rapidity of the current and its generally low banks, the best facilities for irrigation, at small expense, that I have seen anywhere.

On August 14th we reached the base of the main chain of the Rocky Mountains, not far from the mouth of Clark's Fork Cañon.

At six, on the morning of August 15th, we commenced the ascent of the main chain of the Rocky Mountains, at this point called Clark's Fork Mountain, and not far distant from the mouth of the cañon of Clark's Fork River. This cañon ranks in length and in grandeur of scenery with the cañons of the Yellowstone, the Arkansas, the Animas and the Colorado; it is twenty-four miles in length, and at places nearly 3,000 feet in depth. We passed up the mountain range, sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback, until we reached the summit ridge, and, turning along the ridge through a succession of grassy parks, enclosed with beautiful

varieties of pine and cedar, we reached a point commanding a view of surprising magnificence. To the east, the summit of the Big Horn range was in view, distant over a hundred miles, while intermediate was the smaller range of Pryor's Mountains. To the south, were the valleys of Wind River, Grey Bull and Stinking Water, and, encircling these valleys, further to the southwest, were the Shoshone and Wind River ranges, with their lines of perpetual snow, extending around to old Camp Stambaugh. In the valley of Stinking River were the isolated peaks of Hart and Cedar Mountains, and bearing more to the northwest were the high peaks of the Stinking River Mountains, the snow range, and Bear Tooth Mountains, while up the valley of Clark's Fork and near where it takes its rise, standing up against the sky, were Pilot Knob and Index Peak, the great landmarks of the Rocky Mountains. After feasting our eyes on this view, unparalleled in grandeur and extent, we continued our march through grassy parks, until we reached the edge of the valley of Indian Creek, which was to be our camp for the night. We made the descent of 1,900 feet into the valley, in a distance less than a mile. Horse and man did considerable sliding in getting down this precipitous descent. Indian Creek empties into Clark's Fork, and our camp was in a beautiful spot, not far from its mouth.

Next morning, at six, we resumed our march, following up Clark's Fork to Crandal's Creek, encamping in its valley, and not far distant from the main river. Here game was very abundant. However, no distinction in this respect should be made, for elk, deer, antelope, mountain sheep, bear, mountain grouse, Richardson grouse, sage chickens and trout were abundant on the whole line of our march from Tongue River.

As it was necessary to give a day's rest for the repair of pack-saddles and readjustment of packs, word was sent round that we would remain in this beautiful camp for the next day. A party was at once organized, consisting of Colonel Sheridan, General Strong, Mr. Sheldon, with Campbell, the guide, and Patrick, one of the head packers, to go over to the frozen lakes near the foot of Bear Tooth range, and take an evening's hunt for elk. The distance was about ten miles. They killed, in the evening, seven elk, and could have killed many more, as the country was occupied by hundreds of these beautiful animals. One herd of 150 amused them by swimming with their young in the lake, taking, as it were, an evening bath. The party did not kill any more, as the orders were that no more game should be killed than could be consumed by the command. The elk killed were very fat and of fine flavor. Previous to this time we had killed twelve or thirteen, along the route of our daily marches, which, with the other game we killed in the same way, kept our large command bountifully supplied with fresh meat.

On August 18th, at six, we resumed our march up Clark's Fork, the trail being much rougher than on any day previous, and encamped at the base of Pilot Knob and Index Peak.

Next morning, at six, we resumed our march, passing along the base of Pilot Knob and Index Peak, and, turning the latter to the northwest, we crossed over the summit of the mountains, and encamped on Soda Butte Creek, a tributary of the Upper Yellowstone.

Just after crossing the divide, we struck a mining camp, where we found a few miners with, I think, good claims. They were there watching their claims, but could not work them, as they were, unfortunately, on the Crow reservation—but just on the edge of it. Two or three of these men had been there for eight or nine years, waiting for some Congressional action to permit them to make their fortunes. If such relief should come, I believe they will do well, as they have good "prospects," and there are plenty more of the same kind in the neighborhood. It would be well if Congress could give relief to these poor fellows. Some of them, at least, located without knowing that they were on the Crow reservation; subsequently, the Crows wanted to give up all their present reservation, and go over to the Judith Basin, and there were, for a long time, doubts as to what were the limits of the reservation, or where it would be. This mining country is of no use to the Crows, and should be purchased by the Government at a nominal price, and should be thrown open to add to our gold and silver production.

At the usual hour in the morning of August 20th we resumed our journey down Soda Butte Creek, passing by an extinct geyser, and about 8 o'clock reached and crossed the east branch of the Yellowstone River, thence proceeding down the valley of this stream until near its junction with the main river, when we crossed over on Baronette's Bridge, making our camp on the west side. While coming down the valley of Soda Butte Creek we had crossed the line and entered the Yellowstone Park. Early next morning we resumed our march via Tower Falls and Mount Washburn, thence up the cañon of the Yellowstone, encamping at the great falls.

On the morning of August 22d we resumed the march, passing by Sulphur Mountain, the Devil's Caldron, Mud Geysers, where we made an early camp, most of our party going up to the Yellowstone Lake, but a few miles distant. Next morning, at the usual hour, we resumed our march, passing through large open parks, alternating with dense pine woods, and one or two low swampy bottoms, making by our day's

journey the Lower Geyser Basin, encamping very near the Fountain Geyser, and the crater of the Paint Pots. Next day we continued our journey, crossing the Lower Geyser Basin, and up the valley of the Fire Hole River to the Upper Geyser Basin, pitching our camp only a few hundred yards from the geyser known as Old Faithful. From this camp we had the pleasure of witnessing, during our stay, the action of nearly all the grand geysers of this wonderful place, so fully described by Barlow Hayden and others. The phenomena witnessed was fully up to and exceeded our expectations. Our only regret is the indifference shown by the Government, probably from want of appreciation of the wonders of this interesting country. The area of the park is thirty-three hundred square miles; the altitude is high; the surface is covered by open grassy parks, surrounded by dense pine forests, and having near its centre the Yellowstone Cañon, and the Upper, Lower and Middle Geyser Basins. We found the forests on fire for miles, at five or six different places. The craters of many of the geysers, where the water was spouted up as high as 200 feet in column, were partly wedged up by good sized trees pushed in with the butt end down, so that our large force of men could not pull them out, and visitors, men, women and children, with axes, hatchets and hammers, were there then, mutilating the craters of the geysers in the most wanton and provoking manner.

The Congressional appropriation of \$15,000 annually for this park, out of which comes the salary of the superintendent and game keeper, and perhaps some incidental expenses, is too small to give much of a balance for the improvement of the roads and trails, so that really the work done in the summer has to be so temporary that it is washed out by the winter rains. These two men cannot take care of this extensive park. A larger appropriation should be given by Congress, and an engineer officer should be detailed to expend it on improvement of the trails and roads, with a company or two of cavalry to be stationed in the park for the summer, to watch and prevent the burning of forests, and the mutilation of the craters, and other singular phenomena of the geysers.

On August 27th we took up the line of march down the Fire Hole River, encamping at the foot of the Lower Geyser Basin, and next day crossed over to the Madison, thence up that river, leaving it at the foot of Tyhee Pass, through which our direction led over to Henry Lake, and thence down Henry's Fork of Snake River, and over to Camas Station, on the Utah Northern Railroad, where we took the cars for Ogden, and thence by the Union Pacific Railroad for home.

The Tyhee Pass at Henry Lake is very low. One can scarcely realize that he is passing through one of the gaps of the Rocky Mountains. A railroad could be constructed from Williams Junction, on the Utah Northern Division of the Union Pacific Railroad, or from several other points not far distant by Henry Lake and Tyhee Pass down the Madison and through the short cañon of Gibbons Fork, and up the Fire Hole River to the Upper Geyser Basin, on almost a minimum grade.

At Camas Station we separated from our escort, which was directed to return to Fort Laramie, via the Teton and Union Passes to the head waters of Wind River, thence down that river to Fort Washakie, on the Shoshone reservation, and thence home by the nearest and most practicable route.

Our troops had never gone through this pass, and but little was known of the route, except to the Shoshone Indians. I submit the very interesting report of Colonel Kellogg, whose company formed our escort, descriptive of this route. I also submit the exceedingly interesting report of Surgeon W. H. Forwood on the flora of the country passed over on our long but exceedingly interesting expedition. We had no sickness, no accidents, and our escort and pack trains were returned to Fort Laramie in good condition, after having traveled some sixteen hundred miles. A map of the Yellowstone National Park, Big Horn Mountains, and adjacent country, prepared in the office of the Chief Engineer of this Division, is transmitted herewith.

I have the honor to be, General, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

P. H. SHERIDAN,

Lieutenant General Commanding.